



The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waynesboro

The “Ad World” Versus the Real World

By Anne Cooper-Chen

“Global aging, along with climate change, may be the great challenge of this century.”

Paul Irving, Center for the Future of Aging, the Milken Institute

The first UU principle affirms “the inherent worth and dignity of every person” — including us geezers, of course. Clearly, geezerhood isn’t what it used to be. Life spans, which remained flat throughout most of humankind’s history, zoomed up in the past century, as these statistics attest:

- 1935- Social Security established; average U. S life expectancy was 61
- 1960- only 10% of the U.S. population was over 65
- 2011- the first boomers reached 65; all 76 million baby boomers will retire in waves thereafter
- 2020- U.S. life expectancy today is nearly 80

How does today’s culture deal with the reality of older adults in our population? Media can provide a partial window into respect for them (or lack thereof) and other cultural values, but as scholars Shoemaker & Reese state, “content does not perfectly describe reality. . .it singles out and highlights certain elements over others.” One well-studied aspect of media

advertising can shed light on how U.S. culture views its older adults.

Many of you have subscribed to *Time* magazine, I’d guess. If you still read it, consider not just its articles, but also its advertising. My collaborator and I decided to do just that, systematically. Earlier this month, we finished a study of 5,796 models pictured in *Time* magazine’s advertising over the past 20 years. We discovered a serious misportrayal of Americans aged 60 or older — not a realistic reflection, but a distorted mirror (Pollay, 1986).

The 590 older models (overall, 10.2% of the “ad world” population) steadily increased in visibility over the past 20 years, approaching but never quite equaling their real-world U.S. percentage (22.6% in 2019).

The mirror’s gender distortion stands out as our study’s most striking finding; *Time*’s older models inhabit a world more than three-quarters (76.4%) male — quite contrary to the actual demographics: 4.942 million more older

females than males in 2020.

The 2016 *Time* ad for the Alzheimer’s Association, shown here, makes two key points. First, as a health-related example, it represents by far the largest sub-category (35.0%) of



ads associated with older people. (And yet frail or infirm models were not shown, even in ads for drugs such as treatments for late-stage cancer.) Second, the Black woman pictured represents a nearly invisible “citizen” of the ad world. In one subset of ads in our study, four times as many Black men as Black women were pictured. I felt a visceral, cheering reaction every time I coded a Black female model, so rare were they.

Given marketers’ persuasive aims—to sell a product or promote a cause (like Alzheimer’s awareness)—one would not expect altruistic portrayals, but representations veer far from acknowledgement of the worth and dignity of older adults, especially Black women. Take a look at print and TV ads instead of tuning them out to see if you notice this same skewed world.

Our member, Anne Cooper-Chen, is a retired professor of mass media who continues to do research in her field.

Notes from the Board President

By Diane Ganiere

Health to you all! I wish physical, mental, and emotional well-being for you and everyone close to you. As we are people who believe in the one-ness of all, I also wish health for our community and our country, as well!

As we discussed in the November Board meeting, the news of the new vaccines is very encouraging, but the Fellowship must err on the side of caution in terms of opening our doors. It seems even the medical experts, although they predicted a rise in cases, find the new numbers staggering. So we don’t expect to return to in-person services until at least May but will happily do so sooner if it’s safe.



Meanwhile, bravo and thanks to those who carried off our first virtual service auction so handily: Florence Ferguson, Nancy Lay, Donna Nicely, and especially Kay Yost. These events do not take place without a lot of attention and work. Thanks also to those who donated their services and/or possessions, and those who contributed financially to the auction’s success. Finally, a continuing vote of appreciation to Reverend Paul, Megan Nolde, and the Worship and Arts Committee who manage the technology and programs that keep us connected. Keep staying safe!

UUA President Reflects on Election

“Across the country, UUs showed up to protect the integrity of the electoral process, as election workers, poll monitors and election defenders. UU the Vote and local grassroots partners—including in contested states like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Arizona and Georgia—helped mobilize historic voter turnout!

“Even as we recognize the scope of our work, I am aware of how incredibly difficult these last four years have been. And the election cycle is still laden with fraudulent claims. The President is spreading pernicious misinformation that is dangerous to our democracy. His thwarted attempts to discount votes in Detroit, Philadelphia, Atlanta and Milwaukee amount to trying to steal the electoral count and are deeply rooted in anti-Black racism. [Election Defenders](#) is a core organization to volunteer with to help protect the vote in states around the country, including important virtual actions.”

Excerpted from [Susan Fredrick-Gray's message of November 19 on the UUA website.](#)